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Two years ago I was fortunate enough to participate in a Summer Institute on Education and Democracy at the University of Manitoba, Canada. This intense two week study allowed me to reflect deeply on what I believe it means to be an educated person, how I define democracy, and how I frame and pursue the living of a good life for myself and my students. By the time I returned to my classroom in the fall, the philosophical issues of education, democracy, and living the good life were at the forefront of my mind and became the foundational thoughts for how I approached teaching.

Thus, my thesis research design centered on the integration of democratic theory with my teaching practice, and its implementation in the routines of my French Immersion Grade One class. With both language development and the fostering of a more democratic classroom community in mind, I initiated an action research study. This method of inquiry provided direction for the design, implementation, and refinement of an alternative to the traditional primary Show'n'Tell routine, a new routine that I named Nos histoires, or Our Stories.

In this paper, I summarize the study, beginning with brief descriptions of the innovation, Nos histoires, the purpose of the study, and the research method. I share the action research process and my reflections using Brown's (2004) meaning-making model of action research, the learning circle, as an organizing framework. The four stages of this model, Wholeness, Awareness, Meaning, and Commitment, are used as headings to report stages of the study. This framework helped me align a series of actions with an overall purpose, and integrate objective knowledge from several lines of research with my own classroom experience and beliefs. The learning circle also helped me gain reflective skills for framing other educational problems and designing creative solutions. A careful description of the way my work was guided by this framework may help other teachers adapt the process for themselves.

The paper is written in the first person, because I, Andrea Davy, am the teacher who conducted the action research in my classroom. However, throughout the study, my thesis supervisor, Willow Brown, has been my guide. Together we have refined and elaborated our understandings of literacy development, democratic practice, and action research processes, and both of us have played an active role in the work of writing and revision for publication. This paper contains, in the spirit of social constructivist learning, our co-constructed insights.

The Innovation: Nos histoires

As a Grade One French Immersion teacher, I examined the routines I had been planning and leading throughout the school day, in light of the reading I had been doing on democratic dialogue and the good life. I discovered I was dissatisfied with the Show'n'Tell time. In typical primary classrooms, Show'n'Tell is a question and answer routine that occurs when each student has a turn to share an object they have brought from home. The presenting student shares a few sentences about the object, for example, "This is my doll. I got her for my birthday. Her name is Polly." Then the several students in the class may put up their hands to ask the presenter a question about the object. Usually the questions demand the same information that was already provided in the sharing presentation, for example, "Who gave it to you?", or students made a comment, "I like her dress." The doll is passed around and Show'n'Tell is over. I was unhappy with this routine because my observations of repetitive questioning indicated that students were not listening to each other carefully. In addition, when a student showed his or her object, or when students asked questions, they seemed to be interacting with me, the teacher, more than with each other. I wanted to encourage authentic French language practice while at the same time removing myself from the dialogue in order to encourage students to truly engage in discourse with one another. I wanted to see children speaking and listening to one another without the aid of an adult. This is how Nos histoires came to be.

The challenge in designing Nos histoires was to create a routine that was not promoted as one student's day to share, which I saw as undermining the ideal of equality, due to the presenter having more opportunity to speak than other students. A student was appointed each day as the storyteller and leader. Parents were asked to help their child prepare a story of personal interest, which often revolved around family life. The students and I sat in a circle on the carpet; the leader would begin the routine by sharing his or her story and then moderate the subsequent discussion by choosing other speakers. Other class members could volunteer similar stories or ask questions to build meaning. Children were encouraged to speak directly to one another.

Purpose for a Study of Nos histoires

The purpose of this study was to see if the design and implementation of a new routine, Nos histoires, would increase proficiency in the French language, enhance student interactions for the purpose of scaffolding knowledge among peers, and provide a space for practicing democratic principles of dialogue. A reading of the literature suggested that the act of storytelling is a powerful learning tool that involves the collaboration process and the construction of meaning while making connections between their own stories and those of their peers (Booth & Barton, 2000; Donoahue, 2001; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Senehi, 2004; Wells, 1986). It was my hope that in structuring a classroom routine whereby students had the opportunity to share their personal narratives on a daily basis, students would not only use more French in the classroom, but they would also increase their awareness of how to participate in a community by listening and responding to information provided by their peers.

Research Method

In this section, I justify my choice of action research method, and then provide an overview of the process, including methods of data collection and analysis, and problem solving steps that occurred within cycles of action and reflection. The section concludes with notes about the classroom context.

Action Research: Teacher as Listener and Learner

Teaching is a profession. Professional practice implies scholarly pursuit: on the job action guided by research, evidence, sound theory, and a commitment to learning (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Professional "learning involves critically reflective practice in which we question our assumptions and personal experiences, and we inquire into the perspectives of students, colleagues, the social context, and the literature" (p. 11). When

teachers are listening and observing, they are equipped to modify their practices according to a broader vision.

Classroom action research is an appropriate method for a study concerned with improving classroom practice because change or educational reform, should start within the activity system, that is, within classrooms, schools, or districts (Wells, 2000). It is "important to encourage the participants in these local communities to become agents of change by trying to improve the activity systems in which their development takes place" (p. 60). Teacher researchers reflect on their practice, systematically make changes, and as a result are continually in the process of improving their practices, which, according to Cazden (1988), are the most precious classroom resources.

Thus action research was chosen as an appropriate method for this study, with its emphasis on aligning language-learning practices with an expanded, more democratic vision of teaching and of classroom life. Brown's (2004) meaning-making model of action research, the learning circle, provided a series of steps to guide the inquiry process further. Briefly, this approach was a guide for integrating the objective, theoretical knowledge of the literature with the data as I interpreted it through the lens of my own professional experiences, beliefs, and values. The promise of this model was that the research process would lead to well-justified change in teaching practices, sustained over time by the internal commitment of the teacher. Further, the meaning-making approach of this model was coherent with the meaning-making inherent in Nos histoires: I saw both as practices that would increase participation and agency by validating subjective perspectives and unique voices. As students found their voices in my classroom, this research method would provide me with an opportunity to clarify my own professional voice and contribute to the body of educational knowledge.

Overview of the Research Process

The Wholeness stage of the learning circle (Brown, 2004) involved exploring related literature to develop a personal vision of the ideal, and framing the problem and research questions as an attempt to move toward that vision. As I began to design the innovation, Nos histoires, I drew on the literature to identify ideals that would define my vision of a routine with the potential to facilitate development of the good life in the classroom. I added a list of responsibilities of both teacher and student, in order to visualize a successful session of Nos histoires by translating democratic and language acquisition theories into observable behaviour.

Awareness involved collecting data, primarily student responses, and included ongoing assessment and revision of the developing innovation to move it toward my original vision. This stage began with the implementation of the Nos histoires routine in the third week of school; Nos histories were shared each morning for ten to twenty minutes and continued into December; this enabled three months of data collection. Approximately twice a week students continued the storytelling activity with a free writing journal activity. Data included transcribed videotapes of the Nos histoires routine and a researcher's journal of reflective comments that included notes on problems observed and alterations made to the Nos histoires routine. In this stage I became more aware of the effects of the innovation, as well as of its developing success in terms of my ideals. I realized that many smaller learning circles were taking place within the overall action research process. I wondered about issues, such as showing objects, splitting up the class into smaller groups, and whether or not to interrupt students. I returned to my ideals as the guidepost for my problem solving, which emphasized the importance of beginning a cycle of inquiry with Wholeness.

In the Meaning stage, I reviewed the videotapes several times in search of categories and patterns. I made a tally of conversations in English and French, and noted the number of

student interactions as well as the quality of dialogue in response to a story. Student-initiated conversations, as defined by Whitmore (1997), include interactions where a student begins a new topic, a topic is developed into an extended conversation, and the conversation draws in other students. Thus, an interaction was identified if a student asked a question regarding the story, a student made a comment that showed meaning making, or new knowledge was shared.

Finally, in the Commitment stage, I articulated the lasting changes to my educational practice and returned to the vision to identify further inquiries. Publication of this article is part of my commitment to dialogue as it enables me to share my newly developed understandings with teaching colleagues.

The Classroom Context

The participants in this study consisted of the 22 students in a Grade 1 French Immersion class. I shared teaching duties with another part-time teacher who was not involved in the study. Students in the class ranged in age from five to seven years. There were eight boys and fourteen girls, and the majority of students were Caucasian. Almost all of the students came from two-parent homes with middle class incomes. The French Immersion program is a public school choice offered to families for whom French is not the first language. French Immersion students are educated in French, with the expectation that they will be fluently bilingual by graduation. In this school system, kindergarten students are introduced to the French language and Grade One students are expected to transition from primarily English to primarily French communication over the course of the year.

Of the 22 students, 19 spoke English at home and were learning French at school. One spoke Spanish as his first language and was learning English and French. Two of the students spoke both English and Punjabi at home. All of these students entered my class with very little French knowledge. The children had one year of French language training in kindergarten. Two of the students were beginning school in French for the very first time and so had no extensive prior exposure to the language.

This was my second year teaching Grade 1 in French. Previously, I had taught English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Second Dialect (ESD) to students in kindergarten through grade 7 at an inner-city school. It was during these years working with many Aboriginal students that I became interested in storytelling as a learning tool for reading and writing. Another influential experience was the time I had spent transcribing student's dictated stories to practice reading and writing skills and to build confidence in themselves as children capable of sharing what was important to them. As a result of these experiences, I wanted to continue to explore the power of storytelling for second language learners in an immersion setting.

The Four Stages of My Learning Circle

In this section I present research activities in greater detail, within the organizing framework of the learning circle stages (Brown, 2004).

Wholeness: The Literature and the Expanded Ideals

In the planning stage of the research, I sought to expand my professional vision with pertinent literature. I built upon Fenstermacher's (2000) notion of ideals as the "stars" we want students to reach, and the corresponding goals that are the small, measurable steps we take to reach those stars. I then drew on such topics as the role of language in learning as well as second language acquisition and the structure of classroom discourse. In summary, theorists have emphasized the importance of experiences for constructing knowledge, and of opportunities to share those experiences and make sense of them through language (Bruner, 1966, 1979; Dewey, 1938; Wells, 1986). Teachers can play an important role in helping children transition from the oral discourse used at home to the more formal language used at school (Clay, 1991; Corson, 1988; Michaels and Cazden, 1988). Finally, second language learners are

likely to benefit from opportunities to tell their own meaningful stories in a new language, if use of the first language as a stepping stone is encouraged (Nunan, 1991), and if their attempts are not overcorrected (Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1990).

I connected language and democracy literature with a view of dialogue as the talking and listening that takes place within a democratic context where people have equal opportunities to participate (Arendt, 1968; Pitkin & Shumer, 1982; Habermas, 1996). Thus, I wanted to design an approach to classroom discourse that would involve all students in sharing their personal experiences. Senehi (2000) explained that "the ability to tell and understand stories and narrative is probably an innate human capacity….Storytelling is not restrictive by economic class [therefore]…storytelling is a process that is profoundly inclusive" (p. 102-103). The notion that everyone can participate in the sharing of stories suggested that storytelling would be an excellent process for practicing democratic dialogue. Although I knew that classroom participation would always be somewhat unequal and teacher-managed, I trusted in Gutman's (1996) argument that "an appreciation of basic freedoms and their centrality to human dignity, self-respect and well-being often makes non-ideal democracy both apparently and really better than its alternatives" (p. 343).

Awareness and Meaning

Awareness, the action and data collection stage, blends into Meaning, the interpreting and reflecting stage of Brown's (2004) model of action research. Here I continued to refine the innovation according to my ideals, and I began to analyze all of the data in relation to the research questions for which I began the study. Did I establish a classroom routine based on democratic and sociocultural theory that (a) increased proficiency in the French language, (b) enhanced student interactions for the purpose of scaffolding knowledge among peers, and (c) provided space for practicing democratic principles of dialogue? A summary of observations and interpretations follows, beginning with a section highlighting problem-solving, the inner cycles of action, reflection, and revision. I used these processes to work through difficulties and eventually arrive at a point of satisfaction with the Nos histories routine.

Subsequent sub-sections discuss French language use, children's scaffolding of knowledge for each other, and opportunities for democratic dialogue. The Awareness and Meaning section concludes with discussion of some unexpected insights. Overall, the evidence presented here has caused me to believe that I was successful in establishing an effective routine to address the ideals that I had envisioned.

Problem solving: Action, reflection, and revision. Practical problem-solving is a characteristic of action research (Sagor, 1993). Solutions are achieved over time through cycles of action, reflection, and decision-making for revised action. Nos histoires was a dynamic routine that evolved as I cycled through stages of the learning circle. My journal played an important role in the reflection and decision-making process. It was here that I combined my ongoing planning with my long term goals for the class by asking myself questions about what I was doing as a teacher and how the children were responding. I developed a keener sense of awareness of student behaviour and development as I watched videotapes of the sessions.

In this study, the Nos histoires routine was revised in response to several major issues, including the optimum time of day for the routine, the role of objects in sharing, and the size of the sharing group. First, I experimented with having Nos histoires at various times of the day. By the third week, it became routine to begin the day with Nos histoires. An October journal entry documents reasons for the decision:

Today was a good day. I liked starting with Nos histoires. It seemed to set the tone for the rest of the day. It was nice to be able to start the day informally, to chat with one another before getting busy to work. The students seemed to like it, too. This morning they had a wonderful

conversation with one another about fishing and camping.

The role of objects in Nos histoires became an issue by the fifth week, when more students were bringing items to show and problems arose in ensuring that each student had an opportunity to view the items. We tried passing the objects around, but I found this was too distracting and other stories were not shared or listened to carefully because the focus of attention remained on the objects. Because objects were interfering with my vision of a sharing routine where students were participating and responding respectfully to one another, I made the decision not to allow them. This was a new Commitment that helped to refocus the routine on its original ideals.

Also about the fifth week, group size became an issue; I began to question the effectiveness of having all the students sit together in one large circle. I decided that if my purpose was to build a sense of community in the classroom by engaging students in dialogue, dividing the class into smaller groups would allow for more storytellers and more informal questioning (Cazden, 1994). Yet, I struggled with the idea that the whole class should be a community and that a split would mean that students would no longer be participants in a common experience. We continued as one group until I developed further awareness by reconsidering Whitmore's (1997) comment, "[We] left the students to continue discussions without me….This demonstrated our trust in students to teach one another, an essential part of community" (p. 116). To see if students could truly share their voices with one another I needed to remove myself from Nos histoires.

I had already experimented with leaving the students on their own by allowing them to begin the routine while I spoke to a parent, and I knew that students had been able to explain the routine to a substitute teacher when I was absent. Thus, I was confident that the students could work in a small group independent of the teacher. In mid-November I split the group into two, with a student group leader for each group. Halfway through the sharing time, the storyteller leaders switched groups so that both groups would hear the same stories. I stayed with one group throughout, and the other group was videotaped. At times I did go to the other group to refocus them or remind them to speak in French, but for the most part they interacted independently.

New awareness emerged as the videotapes showed that my presence did change the dynamics of the group and as a result affected student dialogue. It seemed that the children interacted more when the teacher was not present, whether the leader was sharing for the first time or the second. In the Meaning stage, I interpreted the split as supporting the objectives of Nos histoires. However, I am not arguing that the teacher is unimportant in the process. By this time, the routine was well-established and the students were familiar with it. I do not believe the children would have been as successful in an independent group without the direct teaching and practice that initially took place as a whole group.

French Language Use. To determine if students increased their proficiency in the French language, I observed the extent to which students were using French in their stories, whether they were helping other students use more French in their stories, and what words and phrases were becoming an automatic part of the students' second language. In the tradition of an exploratory case study, my intention was not to prove the generalizable effectiveness of Nos histoires for language acquisition, but to learn to use Nos histoires to facilitate language growth for students in this classroom. This section explains my observations of student use of French in Nos histoires.

Students were encouraged to dialogue using as much French as possible. When I heard a word or phrase repeated by the students, I would stop the class and provide the French translation. Thereafter the students were expected to repeat that particular word or phrase in French. If students were not using as much French as I thought they were capable of, I would stop stories and say, "Recommence en français" [Start again in French]. In most instances, the stories consisted of more English

words than French words, which is to be expected in a French Immersion Grade 1 class in the beginning months of the school year.

By the fifth week, I noted in my research journal that the children were using French phrases in their stories on a regular basis. Students began their stories with "Un jour" [Once], added familiar family names such as "Maman" [Mom], "Papa" [Dad], "ma soeur" [my sister], or "mon frère" [my brother], and also used "nous sommes allés…" [we went…]. Often common French words that were spoken in English were corrected by fellow classmates. For example, if a student said, "My cat…", another student would call out, "chat". Two of the students had told stories completely in French.

I understood that due to maturation the students would increase their proficiency in French simply by attending the class. Because no pretests or control groups were included in this study, it was difficult to attribute growth in the area of French proficiency to Nos histoires. However, as a teacher of students studying a second language, I was content to see that Nos histoires provided children with opportunities to use French without my prompting.

In comparing the conversations that occurred in Nos histoires with the language used in my previous Grade 1 French Immersion class, it appeared that with Nos histories students had more opportunities to repeat common phrases. Because many stories were related, the same terms were repeated again and again, which allowed for certain phrases to become automatic, for example, "Un jour, nous sommes allés . . ." [One day we went …].

In the first few weeks of Nos histories, many of the stories centered around sightings of wildlife. For example, one student said, "Papa drove from Quesnel and saw deux bébés ours dans la forêt [Dad drove from Quesnel and saw two baby bears in the forest]." For many days, the students shared stories similar to this and as a result were able to practice using animal vocabulary. This evidence supported the assertion that language production that occurs in the context of social interaction allows students to "try out their knowledge of the language" (Johnson, 1995, p. 84) and thus "push to the limit their emerging competence" (Nunan, 1991, p. 50).

The data show that more of the students' stories were told using some French (62%) than were told using English only (38%). I was surprised at how often the children used French in their stories, considering that I was not present in most of the transcribed sessions and the students were speaking among themselves. This was a wonderful discovery. I believe that one reason the students did speak French was because they were telling stories with familiar topics and themes, for example, stories about their families or going swimming. Students were motivated to speak French because the vocabulary they were using was familiar, natural, and meaningful to them.

Scaffolding Knowledge. As students shared their stories, they provided information to one another. The following example from my research journal shows that the students were sharing all kinds of factual information with one another, from "fish need water to live" to "fish can bite":

One little girl told a story about family camp. She was in the lake and the fish were tickling her toes. Many kids got involved in the conversation. Two of the boys and the little girl ended up continuing the dialogue even further. They were not putting up their hands to speak but were turn-taking in a respectful manner. Boy#1 thought the girl should have caught the fish. The girl responded, "But I didn't have a net." The talk continued and moved onto the topic of fish needing to be in water or they would die. Boy#2 observed, "But if they are near the shore they'd flop back in the water." Another little girl contributed to the conversation by adding her own story of when her mom was sitting on a log and a fish bit her toes.

Learning from their personal experiences, whether it be camping or watching a television program, the students were able to teach their peers about topics significant to them:

One student shared information from a TV program he had watched. The program was

about bike safety and the student proceeded to model how to fall off a bike safely. Before I knew it, all the kids were practicing the roll used to fall off a bike.

At times students became very involved in sharing information with one another, and often a story started by one child led to a conversation involving several students. In the following videotape transcription, one of the students was sharing a story about him and his brother playing in the pool. Their brotherly play became aggressive and they began pushing each other under the water. Some of the students thought it was funny that the younger brother pushed the older brother under the water. Other children became quite concerned at the action and shared their opinions to the class:

> St#1: "I pushed him underwater."
> [Students laughing, cheering]
> St#2: "That's not funny."
> St#3: "You could die."
> St#1: "No."
> St#4: "Yeah."
> St#2: "That's a rule."
> St#1: "I can see underwater. We kept pushing each other underwater.
> St#2: "That's dangerous."
> St#3: "You could get enough water in your mouth, you could die."
> St#1: "No"
> St#2: "Yeah."
> St#1: "It was only one second."
> St#2: "It's okay if you go underwater."
> *Students were speaking in English.

Another example from my research journal shows how much fun the students had listening to their classmates:

One student was very good at getting the students to pay attention to his stories. He had very good eye contact with the whole class and spoke excitedly about his topic. One story was about monster trucks. The students were enthusiastic and wanted more details. They spoke directly to the student, ignoring my presence. They would repeat, "Tell us more, tell us more about. . . ". The students were really enjoying themselves, laughing, and interacting with one another. They became their own group, participating without adult intervention.

These examples show that the students were listening to one another, enjoying one another's stories, caring about one another enough to respond to each other, and participating in the sharing process .

I believe that the foundation of sociocultural theory (Bruner, 1966; Wells, 2000) is the idea that our learning occurs in the midst of others. The success of Nos histoires in providing scaffolding may be attributed to the fact that at the center of Nos histoires was a focus on student interactions. The students would not have continued engaging in dialogue, and thus continued learning from one another, without first achieving an interest in one another. It is here that the democracy and sociocultural theories become entwined. In my quest to provide a space for practicing democratic principles, I had to include ideals such as having students speak, listen, and respond to each other freely sharing their unique biographies and alternative views of the world. The ideals that guided me in my search toward democratic dialogue also helped me to create an atmosphere conducive to the scaffolding of knowledge among peer groups. Thus within the action of students learning from one another there was also participation in democratic dialogue.

Democratic Dialogue. To determine whether democratic dialogue was taking place in the classroom, I decided to look at the number of interactions children had while sharing. Interactions were identified when students extended one person's sharing of a story into a conversation.

Students initiated extended conversations with one another almost one third of the time. Although, this may not seem like a lot, considering the age group and novelty of the routine, I believe students were successful. The data showed a gradual increase in the amount of interaction between students from October to December. In the first few weeks, the students did not engage in any extended talk. Towards the end of the study, there were at least one or more interactions between the

students. On December 7, 2004 there were eight interactions. I believe this is evidence that the students were becoming active participants and engaging in classroom dialogue.

One particular interaction, recorded and transcribed, stood out for me:

> St#1: "Aujourd'hui, I mean tomorrow I'm going over to *" [difficult to hear]
> St#1: [looks at St#2]
> St#2: "I don't like stinky cheese."
> St#1: "But it's for your spaghetti."
> St#3: "It's really good."
> St#4, 5, and 6: "Yeah"
> St#5: "It's parmesan cheese."
> St#1: "Yeah, it's just called 'stinky cheese'."
> St#2: "We only just put butter on."
> St#6: "I never tried that, I should try that."
> St#2: "...on spaghetti so it can make it slippery."
> [Students giggling] .
> *Students were speaking in English.

In this example the interactive dialogue taking place was a conversation on videotape that took place without the presence of an adult. There was no teacher to enforce turn taking. The students were able to choose what they wanted to talk about, compete with one another for attention, take their turn to speak, and freely interrupt one another. This according to Whitmore (1997) is an example of a trustful relationship. I propose that this trusting relationship showed evidence that we had created a community where students felt safe enough with one another to share their differences and similarities, for example, eating spaghetti in different ways. I believe we created a space where democratic dialogue could be practiced. Students used their voices and were heard by their peers.

Unexpected Insights. As the year progressed, I learned more about my students as a whole. I observed that some of the students who didn't participate in other activities during class did volunteer to tell a story at Nos histoires. In conversations with my teaching partner, who was not involved in this research, I realized how unique Nos histoires was as a learning experience for the children. The observations of some students by my teaching partner did not coincide with my own evaluation of the children's progress; her observations in teacher-directed knowledge-acquisition activities in Social Studies and Science classes portrayed some students as uninvolved and less able. In the student-centered and more open-ended Language Arts environment, particularly Nos histoires, some of the same students had a great deal to share and appeared to be able learners; they viewed as students who participated frequently and tried to speak French wherever possible. I began to realize that we were evaluating the students in different learning contexts and as a result seeing the same students display different skills.

This surprising observation confirmed Gilmore's (1986) argument for the importance of assessing students in a variety of instructional circumstances, including the demonstration of literacy skills in peer contexts. As in our classroom, Gilmore noted that teachers saw students as more or less capable and participative, depending upon the structure of the activity. Students chanting and skipping rhymes on the playground demonstrated literacy skills that were not uncovered by assessment of their participation in teacher-directed classroom activities. In our case, the difference between teacher perceptions was not a conflict, but we simply accepted each other as bringing different views of the children as a learners. The team teaching arrangement allowed for negotiation of report card comments, and grades were assigned to subjects based upon each teacher's observations in that class.

For me, the difference in perceptions of learners revealed a need to move away from the traditional IRE (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) method, where teachers initiate the talk and then evaluate the student response. Alternate methods are needed to allow some students to reveal more of what they were learning. The nature of Nos histoires was peer dialogue, which allowed me to see the students in action from a different perspective. I was not the leader. I did not ask the questions. I did not expect predetermined answers. French phrases were echoed by students. The phrases

they learned were chosen by the students because they were the most frequently used phrases in their stories. There was meaning and purpose behind learning the phrases because Nos histoires provided an opportunity for students to share important messages with their friends.

It was this awareness that also led me to understand why the vocabulary students used regularly in Nos histoires did not transfer to other curriculum areas. Although students would often bring terms from other subjects into their stories (for example, during the Thanksgiving theme, the children used specific vocabulary such as 'le dindon' [turkey] when sharing a Thanksgiving story in Nos histoires; and 'hier' [yesterday] is a term from calendar time), many phrases remained unique to our time in Nos histoires, for example, 'nous sommes allés' [we went], or 'à la piscine' [to the pool]. I saw that Nos histoires provided students with a time and place to practice learned vocabulary because of its unrestricted instructional content. At other times in class, the teaching time was restrictive in that students were unable to use the new language emerging through Nos histoires.

Regarding the significance of Nos histoires, I was thrilled and surprised at the amount of French I was witnessing on the videotape. I was impressed to see evidence to confirm my assessments. However, I also observed that students had some difficulty setting aside their previously learned Show'n'Tell routine. They often returned to the familiar question and answer pattern of their kindergarten year. Still, I was satisfied to realize that there was an improvement in student conversation when students moved away from the conventional Show'n'Tell routine to the storytelling routine of Nos histoires.

The relationships created through Nos histories were most important. The students and I shared our own unique personalities and acted within relationships with others. Thus, we began the process of engaging in a democratic process through dialogue. Although, I cannot confirm that Nos histoires increased the students' proficiency in the French language, I do believe that Nos histoires was a routine that successfully provided the necessary social interaction to create positive learning conditions in a French Immersion classroom.

To summarize the Meaning stage of this study, I found evidence to support the idea that sharing in a storytelling format could be used as a productive instructional tool for the increasing of French language use, the building of concepts through peer learning, and as a space to practice democratic dialogue. I found Nos histoires to be a valuable and successful teaching strategy in all three of these areas. I also discovered that by taking the time to have storytelling each morning, I learned more about the children themselves, their home life, their hobbies and interests, as well as more about their abilities and skills as learners. This knowledge enabled me to scaffold their learning more powerfully.

Commitment

The fourth stage of the learning circle (Brown, 2004) is Commitment, which implies not merely enduring changes in practice but also some inner development or transformation for the teacher. Coulter (2002) explained that "how teachers teach becomes what they teach" (p. 191). I believe these words to be true and have noticed the difference in my own teaching practices as I have internalized the democratic principles of caring and living the good life. As my teaching becomes more caring, so do the attitudes of the students I am teaching. I believe that I have witnessed changes in the attitudes of the students in my class. They want to hear each other's stories and they want to make sure everyone is included in hearing the stories they have to tell.

Beginning with the Wholeness vision of planning, I feel I did not just plan a new routine for Show'n'Tell, but I was determined to strive to create the vision of community and democracy in my classroom while finding opportunities for children to practice French language. As the study progressed, I became more sensitive to the importance of creating a classroom community based on democratic principles. It became more and more critical to

me that each student be made to feel important and confident enough to use his or her voice to express an idea, a question, a story, a problem, or a response.

In addition to the specifics of teaching language and democracy, I became enthralled with the theoretical explanations of authors such as Arendt (1958, 1968), Fenstermacher (1997, 2000), Bruner (1966, 1979), Wertsch (2000), and Noddings (1992). I came to realize how important it is to explore the theories that support practice because the theories are the ideals. As educators, we need ideals to guide our practice.

In the Awareness stage of the learning circle (Brown, 2004), I remained in a constant state of reflection, determining whether or not I was true to my ideals. I found that my own instructional techniques began to change during other parts of the school day. I suddenly began to see opportunities in morning exercises, calendar time, and in math and language arts lessons that allowed me to maintain my ideals so each child had a voice in the classroom. I came to appreciate the value of having some part of the school day reserved for sharing student knowledge without the restriction of having a "right" answer. I will continue to be more aware of the necessity to broaden my approach to evaluation, including consideration of when and where it should take place.

In many areas of teaching, my actions have become more consistent with my ideals. For example, I have altered my parent-teacher interview style to provide more time for parents to share what they believe to be the strengths of their children and the areas in which they wish to see improvement. My altered practice involved asking parents to tell me a story about their child.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasized the important role our surroundings have on who we become (Moll, 2000). For me, living the good life now involves thinking about our lives in relationship to those around us. Nos histoires became an educational practice that expanded into not something to teach but a way of teaching. It was a time to practice how to talk to one another and a time to practice how to listen to one another. As my students and I developed the skills of Nos histoires, I came to value and understand more fully the importance of others as one strives to make the good life a possibility. I have concluded that the good life cannot come to be without caring for others (Noddings, 1992). Along with Colter (2002), I believe that parents who want their children to grow up to be caring adults need to treat their children consistently with that aim. At home and at school, the processes of interaction become the content of what is taught.

In conducting this study, I have become more self-aware as a person and a teacher, which has led to revised action. In fulfilling the Commitment aspect of this study, I have made concerted efforts to discuss curriculum issues with my colleagues. The conversations are not specifically centered around Nos histoires. They are conversations about ideals and visions. As we talk about new curriculum, we discuss how that curriculum will benefit our students beyond learning outcomes. In our discussions, I am able to weigh what I have learned from the literature, what I have learned from my colleagues, and what I have learned from the students to make meaning as an educator in order to find what works best in my classroom. I find the conversations I am drawn to the most are about curriculum that integrates school subjects, for example reading and writing, with social instruction designed to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to community practice. I will continue to engage in such dialogue and to integrate my own experiences in the learning processes for myself and my colleagues. In this way, I too am becoming an involved citizen in the community of education as I practice sharing my own stories with my peers.

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